

**POLITICAL PARTIES SURVEY - MARCH 2010
ELECTION**

Question one

Is your party committed to the implementation of the recommendations from the Myer fire Coronial Inquest? (Please see attachment 1).

.....
.....

While the UFU is not comfortable with some aspects of the Coroners findings his recommendations are appropriate, achievable and in the public interest.

Question two

To the extent that they are relevant to Tasmania, is your party committed to the implementation of the recommendations from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission? (Please see attachment 2).

.....
.....

Some of the recommendations are not relevant because Tasmania was already doing what has been recommended prior to 7 February 2009, particularly in relation to incident control. The full interim report can be accessed at the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission web site

In addition, and in light of the black Saturday bushfires, are you prepared to commit to an independent review into the adequacy of the human and physical resources available to the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) with specific regard to the urban bush interface risk in Tasmania?

.....
.....

An independent assessment of this sort has never been undertaken.

Question three

Are you prepared to fund a third 24 hour 7 day a week career fire and rescue station on the North West Coast of Tasmania?

.....
.....

Please see the attached letter that was forwarded to 3197 businesses on the North West Coast in the week beginning Monday 8 February 2010, plus two stories and an advertisement that have appeared in the Advocate Newspaper (Attachment 3).

Question four

Are you prepared to immediately provide the \$45,000 needed to equip a third southern TFS road accident rescue (RAR) vehicle to be stationed in the Northern suburbs of Hobart?

.....
.....

This commitment requires funding only the patient extrication equipment (cutters and spreaders). That is to say, the vehicle and the station already exist. As things currently stand any response for patient extrication to the northern suburbs and as far north as Brighton must come from either the city station or the Eastern shore station. This means the loss of valuable time. Only the headquarters station and the Clarence station have road accident rescue equipped vehicles – this means that if the headquarters vehicle is at a road crash and the Clarence vehicle is at a house fire there is no capacity for the TFS to respond to another patient extrication incident elsewhere in the Hobart response area.

In addition, are you prepared to immediately commit a further \$45,000 to ensure that the three 24 hour 7 day a week career fire crews in Launceston can respond to multiple road accident rescues and other incidents occurring at the same time?

.....
.....

Currently only two vehicles in each of Hobart and Launceston are equipped with patient extrication equipment.

The career arm of the Tasmania Fire Service and the State Emergency Service (SES) are the only agencies that respond to perform the work of opening up vehicles to extricate

patients from vehicles. Police and ambulance officers respond to such incidents but the actual activity of cutting vehicles open is restricted to career firefighters and the SES. Volunteer firefighters do not do this work for pragmatic logistical reasons (Triabunna TFS volunteers excepted).

The view of the UFU is that there is an urgent need to provide a third set of spreaders and cutters in both Hobart and Launceston but there are greater needs than these immediate ones.

The Tasmanian Government transferred road accident rescue from the Tasmanian Ambulance Service (TAS) to the Tasmania Fire Service for profoundly important reasons. Chief among them was the fact that the TAS could not provide an immediate response for patient extrication from vehicles. Typically, ambulance officers had to stop whatever they were doing in the field and return to their base to change vehicles and then respond. This took up much valuable time and put patients at greater risk. In addition, the TAS was not able to respond to more than one incident at a time in each of the North and South of the state. While there were two TAS units on the North West Coast they were still not adequate given their level of responsibility

The Tasmania Fire Service does have an improved capacity to respond to road accident rescues but this must be balanced against its other TFS emergency response activities. A fire service crew cannot simply stop fighting a fire and go to a motor vehicle accident instead.

The current configuration of TFS road accident rescue equipped vehicles is as follows.

Hobart x 2
 Launceston x2
 Devonport x1
 Burnie x1

This configuration only provides two additional vehicles compared to the TAS days (one in Hobart and one in Launceston) and no net improvement on the North West Coast.

The optimal configuration would be as follows

Hobart x5
 Launceston x3
 Devonport x 2
 Burnie x 2

There are simple and good reasons for providing this funding. Equipping all front line career crew vehicles with road accident rescue equipment would mean that responses would be in the shortest possible time every time. For example, at present in relation to Burnie and Devonport there is no capacity to provide a timely response to a second motor vehicle accident occurring at the same time.

There is only one TFS career crew in Devonport and only one career crew in Burnie. When a significant incident occurs in Devonport or Burnie the crew responds and the volunteer firefighters attached to each Brigade are paged to provide back up at the incident. In the case of a patient extrication incident the volunteers respond to that incident to provide fire suppression at the scene because the career crew cannot perform both roles (patient extrication and fire suppression).

At the same time that this takes place a career recall crew is paged to attend the station to provide a capacity to respond to a potential separate emergency occurring at the same time. The problem is that if a separate incident does occur and is a motor vehicle accident that requires patient extrication, the recall crew does not have a vehicle that has patient extrication equipment on it.

Clearly, this could lead to preventable death.

Similar problems exist in the Hobart and Launceston response areas. **A total sum of less than \$300,000 would change the current TFS road accident rescue capability from barely adequate to best practice.**

The management of the Tasmania Fire Service is on the record as stating that the life expectancy of a set of road accident rescue tools is 10 years. This therefore equates to \$30,000 a year over that time frame.

Are you prepared to give a commitment to provide a total of \$300,000 over the medium term to equip all front line urban pumpers with road accident rescue tools as described above?

.....
.....

The UFU has absolutely no idea why TFS management is dragging its heels on this issue. These problems have been raised with TFS management on many occasions.

Question five

Are you prepared to commit to a dual state wide road accident rescue response with SES and also air support when required?

.....
.....

At the moment in Tasmania there is not a consistent state wide response approach to road accident rescue incidents. There should be no delineation between RAR response to both passenger vehicle and heavy vehicle incidents anywhere in Tasmania.

The TFS should be the primary response for at least 30 kilometres from all career fire stations with a standard crew of 1 officer and 3 firefighters.

All career fire brigades are equipped with technical (heavy) rescue vehicles that are referred to as Unit 8.1 vehicles. These vehicles have extensive equipment in them that can be utilised at any road accident rescue, regardless of the scale. The two new standard TFS heavy pumpers referred to above and also SES vehicles have much lighter gear on them and are only equipped for dealing with cars.

The TFS should also be an automatic back up with Unit 8.1 (heavy rescue) for at least 60 kilometres from all career stations due to the inability to get SES crews on the road quickly or with a minimum of 4 personnel. It should be remembered that volunteers make up the State Emergency Service. While they are greatly respected by career firefighters it remains true that they can never respond as quickly as full time employed firefighters at 24/7 career stations.

At the moment there are areas within the state that are approximately 10 Kilometres away from career stations but career crews do not respond to them leaving patients in cars waiting for lengthened periods awaiting a volunteer SES response (Eg. Forth/Central Coast area).

TFS Standard Operating Procedures state that the first arriving crew at an incident is to be in control. This should be the general response pattern in relation to RAR with the exception of some special areas in the North West, North East, South West and Central Highlands where long distances and long time frames occur. In these areas Unit 8.1 should be an automatic back up response until the first responding RAR crew arrives at the incident and deems that the Unit 8.1 is no longer required. Again, this approach is standard practice in the TFS but it is not being applied to RAR

Dual response would ensure that at multiple vehicle accidents there will be more than one crew there to spread the work load around multiple vehicles and patient extrications. This would give each patient a fighting chance and would relieve the pressure on TFS and SES personnel who have provided a dual response. This contingency is not currently provided for in most of Tasmania.

This system would give all Tasmanians the best possible chance of survival at all road accidents where entrapment is involved.

In addition, Unit 8.1 technical (heavy) rescue appliances should respond to all heavy vehicle accidents (trains, trucks and buses) in Tasmania and should only be turned around when the first arriving RAR crew or Tasmanian Ambulance Service personnel at the

scene determine there is no entrapment. This is currently not happening. The UFU regards this under utilisation as being against the public interest.

Air support

At present there is nothing in place for RAR crews to be deployed to remote areas in Tasmania by helicopter even though tests have been done to see if this is possible.

Some of the hurdles include the fact that helicopter resources and Rota Lift are commissioned only to fly police and ambulance 24/7 in Tasmania. In remote areas a helicopter response backed up by Unit 8.1 would improve RAR responses (Ambulance paramedics are transported now and often are there for long periods awaiting SES crews). Helicopters commissioned from each of the four major centres in Tasmania could cover the state in much faster time frames.

The Joint Tasmanian Road Accident Rescue arrangements have been in place now since December 2006 and it is time for them to be upgraded. In this upgrading money should not be an issue because members of the Tasmanian community have a very a limited opportunity for survival after a road crash. Nor should lines drawn in the sand on the basis of historical boundaries which say don't step on my turf. In this regard it should be noted that the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission identified turf wars as a significant contributing factor to the Black Saturday deaths.

In respect to funding the UFU seeks to point out that the Motor Accident Insurance Board pays up to \$5000 to the rescue authority (TFS or SES) that extricates the patient.

Question six

Are you prepared to give a commitment to ensure that career fire crews are responded to all technical rescue incidents throughout Tasmania?

.....
.....

When the Tasmanian Government transferred road accident rescue from TAS to TFS, technical rescue was also transferred to the TFS. Technical rescue means extricating entrapped persons from trains, trucks and buses.

Technical rescue requires more sophisticated equipment and more specialised rescue techniques.

Some of the additional equipment includes;

- larger capacity cutters and spreaders and additional rams
- Low pressure rescue airbags (large loads)
- high pressure air bags (smaller lifting height)
- Electric winches and additional hand winches
- extensive stabilisation equipment
- elevated rescue platforms (fold up)
- additional hydraulic pumps
- additional lighting
- rescue spine board

The response area of the State Emergency Service for patient extrication is largely the electorates of Lyons and the West Coast part of Braddon. The SES does not have any of the specialised equipment listed above. Only the TFS has this equipment. Historically the SES has made do with the limited equipment in its possession when responding to incidents involving trains, trucks and buses.

All of the equipment needed for technical rescues has been acquired by the TFS and all of the training required for career firefighters to perform them has been completed.

For some reason the management of the TFS has not altered its automatic response procedures to ensure that career fire crews respond to all train, truck and bus patient extrication incidents throughout Tasmania.

Question seven

Are you prepared to give a commitment to maintain TasFire Equipment as a publicly owned government business enterprise?

.....

TasFire Equipment is involved in the sale and servicing of portable firefighting equipment. Because Tasmania is the most decentralised state, TasFire Equipment ensures that business enterprises throughout Tasmania (including the Bass Strait islands) can meet their legislated obligations in relation to fire safety.

While there is significant competition with the private sector in the major population centres, TasFire Equipment services all of Tasmania and in particular the electorates of Lyons and the newly re-drawn Braddon. **This constitutes a significant cross subsidy from the cities to rural areas which is most definitely in the public interest. If TasFire Equipment were to be privatised, rural and remote Tasmania generally would not be serviced simply because the private sector would not operate in areas where profits cannot be made.**

Question eight

Are you prepared to initiate an independent risk assessment of the fire and rescue needs of the Kingborough municipality?

.....
.....

Currently this municipality is serviced by a volunteer fire brigade with back up from adjoining volunteer brigades and occasional support from Hobart career crews.

As a rapidly growing municipality, Kingston will inevitably require a 24/7 career fire station. Not only would this provide faster response times but the benefits from being able to respond to road accident rescues to the south are obvious.

The risk assessment we seek should be conducted in accordance with the Australian Standard (AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009, Risk management - Principles and guidelines.).

Question nine

Are you prepared to fund an independent review of career firefighter training in the Tasmania Fire Service?

.....
.....

The purpose of this review would be to find ways to improve the delivery of training and skills maintenance of career firefighters around the state.

The Tasmania Fire Service has taken on a number of new roles over the past decade. Many of these are listed in the next question. Some of these new roles, such as road accident rescue, require frequent responses.

More time spent responding to incidents means less time to train and to maintain skills.

Some of these new roles bring different problems. The training required for what the public would understand as responding to an act of terrorism is referred to as chemical, biological, radiological and incendiary response. These fall into a category referred to as low frequency but high risk. The UFU hopes that its members never have to respond to a terrorist incident but the training and skills maintenance required for them to be able to do so has to be undertaken.

The training required of firefighters is ever increasing and the time to do it is ever decreasing.

Please see the work value clauses of the last two TFS / UFU enterprise bargaining agreements in this regard (Attachment 4).

Question ten

Is your party committed to maintaining the TFS as the lead authority for the following activities?

- **Road accident rescue**
- **Technical (heavy) rescue including buses, trains and trucks**
- **Aviation (excluding Hobart and Launceston airports which have their own aviation firefighters)**
- **Hazardous materials emergencies**
- **Chemical, biological, nuclear, radiological and incendiary incidents**
- **Industrial rescue**
- **Residential rescue**
- **Urban Search and rescue (collapsed buildings)**
- **High angle rescue (rope rescue in the urban environment)**
- **Trench rescue**
- **Marine firefighting?**

In other words, are you prepared to give a commitment to maintain the status quo?

.....

.....

Question eleven

Are you prepared to assign to a government agency a supervisory role to facilitate stronger adherence to the guidelines jointly developed by the Tasmania Fire Service and the Local Government Association of Tasmania regarding fire safety in residential developments? (Please see Attachment 5).

.....

.....

The UFU is concerned that while the guidelines that have been negotiated in good faith between LGAT and the TFS are entirely appropriate, they are not being observed as they should. For example, the guidelines make the obvious point that there should be more

than one exit road from a housing development in a bushfire prone area. There are many examples of newer housing developments where this guideline has been ignored.

Question twelve

Are you prepared to give a commitment to negotiate with the Australian Broadcasting Commission (radio division) to further enhance its bushfire information service?

.....
.....

The ABC has embraced its role as an emergency services broadcaster but both the information the TFS provides to it and the way it broadcasts information can be improved.

A battery-powered radio (including a car radio) is the only form of easily accessible and immediate communication that cannot be compromised by the loss of electricity supply.

Bushfires burn power lines.

These circumstances may change in the future depending on the take up of wireless internet but at present a battery powered radio is the only sure technological means of providing specific and timely bushfire information to all members of the general public.

Signed.....

**David Bartlett
Leader of The Parliamentary Labor Party**

Thank you for completing this survey.